

VZCZCXRO9840
RR RUEHDU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHYD #0873/01 2541554
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 101554Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9245
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE 0199
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000873

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2018

TAGS: [CM](#) [ECON](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: CAMEROON: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON POLITICS,
CORRUPTION, THE ECONOMY

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Scott B. Ticknor for reasons 1.4 (d) and
(e)

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 9, Pol/Econ Chief met with Minister for Parliamentary Affairs at the Presidency and Deputy Secretary General of the ruling CPDM party Gregoire Owona. Owona confirmed that the ruling CPDM party will hold a major Congress in the coming months, indicated that President Biya would run again in the 2011 election, and said that the long-expected Cabinet shuffle is tied to the timing of corruption investigations. He hoped that several pending investment projects would boost the economy. End summary.

Politics

¶2. (C) Owona confirmed that the CPDM will hold an "ordinary" Congress before the end of the year, for the first time in 12 years. The exact timing is undecided and complicated by the budget session of parliament, which he said precluded the meeting from happening in November. The Congress will help the party prepare for the 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections, Owona said, noting that there is need for new leadership in the CPDM Politburo and Central Committee because many members have died, been ineffective, are tired of the position, or are in prison.

¶3. (C) Discussing politics more broadly, Owona said the President is committed to creating a Senate (as required under the constitution) "before the next election," although Owona claimed the timing was totally unrelated to the upcoming CPDM Congress. When asked if the CPDM Congress would deliberate on who the party's presidential candidate for 2011 would be, Owona responded "it's obvious who the candidate will be" (referring to President Biya) but "it's too soon" for him to declare openly. Owona asserted that Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) would be created by December or January and he expected the CPDM to do well in re-runs of six Douala mayoral races which the Supreme Court recently annulled. (Owona thought controversial, powerful CPDM mayor Francoise Foning would win her seat again. Prime Minister Inoni said the same to DCM in a recent meeting, noting that the main opposition SDF was weak in Foning's municipality.)

¶4. (C) When asked about persistent rumors of a Cabinet shuffle, Owona said "only the President knows" when this will happen. However, he added that many ministers were being questioned about corruption allegations and Biya wanted to wait until there was clarity from these investigations before shifting his Cabinet. "It's not like your country, where suspect officials can be expected to resign," he said, noting that Biya would not want to keep someone who later turned out to be corrupt. Owona was impressed that the Embassy had organized an anti-corruption conference for the military (September 8-11); acknowledging this was sensitive subject matter, he said he had carefully read the Ambassador's speech at the opening of the event and thought it was excellent. The government's crackdown on senior corrupt officials was important ("you have to start somewhere") but he thought much more awareness building about corruption was needed.

Economics

15. (U) Pol/Econ Chief expressed concern that Cameroon's economy does not appear to be picking up. Owona replied "you're right to be worried," but he was confident that the next few months would bring important positive news on the economy. He cited movement in the energy and mining sectors and the privatization of CAMAIR, although he did not know the details.

Comment

16. (C) The delayed creation of ELECAM, the deliberative would-be Cabinet shuffle, the rare party Congress with details left sketchy, the Senate put into the future, the arrests of senior former ministers for corruption all seem to point to a slow-motion, methodical path toward reinstating Biya in 2011. During a recent trip to the East and North, several senior CPDM officials confirmed to Emboffs the view that the party leadership is primarily focused on regime preservation, including preservation of corruption and patronage networks. CPDM contacts believe that Biya has a plan for how the next few years will play out, generally believe that only he knows his plan, and agree that as a result talking about succession is virtually taboo within the party. Biya's air of mystery keeps his party stalwarts on their feet, while retaining a stress level at the top. This is always evident in meetings with Owona who, while friendly, is also inevitably cautious, evasive, and a bit awkward.

YAOUNDE 00000873 002 OF 002

Biya's air of mystery also ensures a level of unpredictability in Cameroonian politics which in the past has at times proven Owona and others in the Presidency wrong.

GARVEY